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Washington, D.C. 20505

22 February 1984

Prospects for Political Takeover by the Yugoslav Military

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SUMMARY

Despite increasing public speculation in Yugoslavia about the armed forces' unhappiness with the ineffectiveness of the civilian leadership, we agree with the US Embassy [redacted] that a forceable replacement of the civilian government by the military is extremely unlikely. Nevertheless, we are convinced that military leaders are becoming more inclined to intervene in political affairs in favor of hardline politicians. We reach this conclusion because of recent public speeches by military leaders and [redacted] their impatience with the leadership's stalemate on political and economic reforms. At the least, we expect sharper military demands for purges of obstructive officials. In the worst case, should Yugoslavia's economic deterioration or ethnic strains lead to outbreaks of violence, we believe the military leaders would restore order, but then move with hardline politicians to reinstate a tighter centralized dictatorship under the Communist Party. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] East European Division, Office of European Analysis. It was coordinated with the Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to [redacted] Chief, East European Division, Office of European Analysis. [redacted]

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We believe that in the event of a recentralized dictatorship, the Kremlin would try to convince the generals and their civilian allies that Yugoslavia needs closer ties to the East. Although a few generals might be sympathetic to this argument, the majority, in our opinion, would opt instead for a go-it-alone strategy. Initially they would probably accept a decline of Western economic influence in Yugoslavia, but they would also want to keep the Soviets at arms length. [REDACTED]

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Military Impatience with Political Stalemate

Evidence is mounting that military leaders are frustrated at the collective leadership's lack of success in coping with the country's 41 percent inflation rate, foreign credit crisis, and systemic economic problems. [REDACTED]

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We believe that increasing political pronouncements by military leaders reflect their growing perception--shared, in our view, by many Yugoslavs--that the military is the only pan-Yugoslav institution able to protect the federation's stability. [REDACTED]

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Over the past year senior officers have made an unprecedented number of speeches critical of political leaders. Most of the key military hierarchy [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] publicly attacked the regime's inability to enforce political discipline. Their criticisms included demands that the civilians:

- purge the party of those resisting economic and political discipline,
- stop an erosion of popular morale before it infects the military itself,
- protect the military budget from future austerity measures.

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The civilian leadership is not acting as if it has received an ultimatum from the generals, but is also being careful to satisfy the military's budgetary and professional demands.

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[REDACTED]

Speculation about a military takeover appears to be a subject of growing public debate. Mamula, in an Army Day interview on 22 December, denounced claims that the armed forces might "usurp political power." But he reaffirmed their commitment to Tito to "defend the revolution," thereby implying that the military has a right to use all its means to preserve Tito's political legacy. In January a member of the Croatian Presidency and former veteran's leader publicly derided speculation about a military coup. These comments may have calmed the fears of some, but they also gave wider publicity to the possibility of a greater military role in politics. [REDACTED]

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"Martial Law" Yugoslav Style

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We agree with the US Embassy in Belgrade that a forceable military takeover, as in Poland, is extremely unlikely in

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[redacted]

Yugoslavia. First, the military makes no pretense of promoting a unique program for solving the economic and political problems that destabilize the post-Tito leadership. In addition, we suspect that key military leaders appreciate that a coup would worsen the sharp ethnic strains that divide Yugoslavia and the armed forces themselves. [redacted]

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We also doubt that the divided civilian leadership could agree to call on the military to establish martial law in an effort to perpetuate their ineffectual rule. Such a decision would require a consensus among civilian leaders that has proved unattainable on much less controversial issues. Slovene and Croatian politicians, in our view, almost certainly would block agreement on such a "honeymoon coup." And without a consensus, the military could not institute martial law without precipitating a major crisis in the leadership and in the country which it might not be able to control. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, if Yugoslavia's malaise deepens to the point of unrest, we believe the military would increase its pressure and support civilians seeking a reversion toward a more restrictive and recentralized society. The conservative military leaders are magnets for those hardline civilian politicians--mostly Serbs, Macedonians, and Montenegrins--pushing for purges of the party and press. This situation creates an opportunity for the Army, if it so chooses, to encourage or support the program of a hardline party faction. [redacted]

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In the event that the situation seriously and quickly deteriorates, we believe that the military would leave barracks to maintain order and encourage hardliners to set aside the constitutionally decentralized structure. In this context, civilians would take the responsibility for subsequent policy performance while the military enforced discipline. [redacted]

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We believe the following events (in ascending order of gravity) would be indicators that this kind of scenario is developing:

- The fall of the government, perhaps this spring. Prime Minister Planinc has threatened to resign several times over policy disputes [redacted]
- [redacted] Her departure, if because of policy failures, would demoralize a leadership already burdened with a political agenda crowded with issues defying collective solution.
- Calls for emergency measures from influential veterans and reserve organizations and from hardline politicians who seek military backing for a recentralization of authority. We believe that such calls for order "from

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[redacted]

below" would further prepare the public for an enhanced military role in politics.

- An outbreak of popular unrest, caused by economic problems and/or Yugoslavia's complex ethnic disputes. We believe that unrest in Bosnia-Herzegovina--where Muslims, Serbs, and Croats live in uneasy proximity--or Croatia, home of traditional anti-Serb enmity, would be the greatest danger to stability. Renewal of serious rioting in underdeveloped and overwhelmingly Albanian Kosovo would also be dangerous, but only if it spills over into Albanian-dominated districts of Serbia, Macedonia, or Montenegro. [redacted]

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Implications for US Policy

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Because some military leaders are resentful about increasing Western economic leverage on the financially troubled country, we believe that the US-led financial assistance effort for Yugoslavia could be in trouble if their influence increases markedly. [redacted]

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[redacted]

Because even hardline Yugoslavs have bitter memories of the strains with Moscow following the 1948 Tito-Stalin break, it does not necessarily follow that a shift in attitudes away from the West would lead to a pro-Soviet Yugoslavia. An explicitly pro-Soviet regime [redacted] even would risk a civil war. Moreover, though Moscow could offer some support to a martial law regime, the Soviets could not hope to replace the West's vital role in the Yugoslav economy. [redacted]

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Following a period of consolidation and isolation, we believe that even a hardline regime would have to support some of the reforms now urged by Western lenders and the IMF. Even hardliners would not ignore the fact that disastrous domestic mismanagement--not Western economic ties--led to Yugoslavia's economic problems. A hardline regime might even try to convince potential Western trading partners that its stress on discipline and efficiency was a necessary precondition for workable economic reforms. [redacted]

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